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## THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE ORTHODOX JEWS IN PALESTINE.

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FOR the orthodox Jew in Palestine today his religion, the keeping of the law, forms the pivot around which the whole day, the week, the year, revolves. He is not only a firm believer in the Divine sanction of all that is laid down in the Talmud, but he has ever the consciousness that he is living his life in the Promised Land. Many a man who appears in Jerusalem in all the garb and habits of ultra-orthodoxy has lived very differently in Europe in his younger days. Now, in the Holy Land, with the eyes of so many equally punctilious around him, he inevitably goes to extremes. Such a man may daily rise at three o'clock in the morning to perform his early devotions; at the least every day before dawn he joins the numbers who may be seen hurrying to the synagogues with their books and praying shawls; and evening finds him on the same errand. During the hours between, all the time that can be spared from what is grudgingly bestowed on the necessities of life is spent in reading the sacred books.

The whole life is hedged about with mystery; good and bad angels surround one, and intervene in every act; all that we recognize as the results of the laws of nature are to them the arbitrary acts of an ever-changing and capricious God, yet a God who is pledged to care for his people, the children of Israel, if they will but follow his laws. "His law," however, is not the Ten Commandments, nor even the law of Moses in the Old Testament; it is a minute code, penetrating every possible relation of life, so that to know it requires a life of study, and to keep it an unremitting watchfulness.

The "law" regulates his food,<sup>1</sup> defining how it is to be

<sup>1</sup> See the *BIBLICAL WORLD*, Vol. XVII (1901), p. 415.

slaughtered, how pronounced clean, how to be cooked, and how to be eaten. It regulates his dress,<sup>2</sup> the trimming of his beard and hair, his marital relations, and every turn of his personal and domestic life. It claims his first thoughts and much of his time. It separates him distinctly from all other peoples by condemning their food as unclean and their persons as unsanctified, while it stamps their own faces with "love locks," adorns their persons with "Arba Kanufoth," praying shawls and tephillin, while mazuzahs fixed to the door posts proclaim to all the Jewish house. It sanctifies his common things, his eating and his drinking, his waking and his sleeping; it marks off every stage of his progress through life, from his birth to his grave, with duties to be done and ideals to be maintained in a way that has sustained him through all the hard centuries of his exile. Year after year he passes through a round of feasts and fasts, each one recalling God's dealings with his race in the past, or his present faithfulness in the changing seasons.

When we are tempted to cavil at what we call the "formalism," "ritualism," or "legalism" of his life, it is well to pause and realize what idealism it has kept alive in their hearts amid circumstances which have all too often in the masses of our great cities produced a blank despair or a gross materialism, with no thought of the great beyond. And when I mention superstitions (as later I must) the reader should remember that I speak of customs equally prevalent in allied forms among the ignorant of both eastern Christianity and Mahomedanism.

The life of the *Cohanim*, or priests, requires special mention. Perhaps many who know Jewish friends of the name of Cohen (or Cowan) have not realized that these are members of a highly privileged class. In the Holy Land, at any rate, the descendants of the priests are mindful of their rights. Daily<sup>3</sup> in every synagogue they exercise their privilege of giving the blessing to the people; the priest stands facing them with his hands arranged to represent the letter ש—the initial of שָׁמָּךְ the Almighty, while

<sup>2</sup>See the BIBLICAL WORLD, Vol. XVIII (1901), pp. 1-12, 172.

<sup>3</sup>In other countries this priestly blessing is bestowed only on Sabbaths and on feasts and on fast days.

his hands and face are veiled lest the glory should prove disastrous to the onlookers, for the shekinah shines through the apertures between his fingers (as is said Cant. 2:9, "he looketh forth at the windows, showing himself through the lattice"). When, too, the law is read in the congregation, the priest has the first right to be called to officiate. He also receives the money for the "redemption of the first-born." On the other hand, the *Cohen* has limitations due to the holiness of his calling. He may not marry a divorced person and he must under no pretext come near a dead body. When even his dearest are dying he is excluded from the room; when there is even a risk of death he must wait without, shivering it may be (as I have often witnessed) in the cold and darkness till all risk of contamination is gone. The bearers of a body for burial announce by shouts their coming in order that the *Cohanim* may clear out of the way.

Except for these customs the priests of modern Israel live their lives like other men; they have no shadow of sacrificial rights—what there is of this rests with the head of each family, apart from any hereditary privilege—and in popular veneration the priests are certainly second to the *Chachanim* or rabbis.

In orthodox Judaism women have a lowly place. The pious Jew thanks God daily that he was born "neither a woman nor an idiot," while the woman is taught to thank God that "he made her according to his will." At the same time, in all her subjection, her ignorance, and her fanaticism, in which she often outdoes her husband, she is usually a contented and even a happy person, satisfied with humble duties and simple joys, and unmindful of her limitations. She is excluded from almost all religious duties. In a few synagogues there is a gallery from which, through a lattice, she can behold her husband and her sons worshiping God for themselves and her; but even this is exceptional, and the few women who desire to see the services must usually look through an outside window. The majority do not attend synagogue services at all, and are content that their husbands should pray for them. They go in considerable numbers to see the scrolls of the law paraded at the "Rejoicing of

the Law," and at Purim every woman is expected to hear the book of Esther read. Only three duties are imperative: (1) to attend to the special regulations for her sex regarding ceremonial uncleanness; (2) to throw a lump of dough on the fire on the eve of the sabbath; and (3) the most precious privilege of lighting the sabbath candles. For neglect of these duties women suffer in child-birth.

The sabbath is perhaps the greatest institution of Judaism. If one sabbath, it is said, were kept properly by all Jews, the Messiah would come. Hedged about as it is with such complications, one must needs be brought up a Jew to know how to keep it, that is, to "make it a delight" and yet to keep clear of the innumerable pitfalls. The day of rest is ushered in by a beautiful ceremony. In every household the sabbath supper (for, of course, the day begins at sunset) is prepared and laid out neatly on the table. The food, which must include two loaves, is covered with a special covering usually of valuable material (silk or plush), and bearing in Hebrew letters the words of the blessing on the wine. The house is put in good order; all the week's work is laid aside; the special sabbath clothes are donned. As the sun sinks, the wife throws the dough on the fire and lights the sabbath lamps—which must burn themselves out, they are not to be extinguished. When sunset comes, the head of the household, as soon as he returns from the special sabbath service in the synagogue, assembles his family at the table and inaugurates the joyful day with a cup of wine—of gladness—which he holds in his hand while he recites Gen. 2: 1-3 and pronounces the blessing of sanctification:

Blessed art thou, oh Lord our God, King of the universe, who createst the fruit of the vine. Blessed art thou, oh Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast sanctified us by thy commandments and hast taken pleasure in us and in love and favor has given us thy holy sabbath as an inheritance, a memorial of the creation, that day being also the first of the holy convocations in remembrance of the departure from Egypt. For thou hast chosen us and sanctified us above all nations, and in love and favor hast thou given us thy holy sabbath as an inheritance. Blessed art thou, oh Lord, who haltest the sabbath.

The wine is tasted by all. He then, as he must before all

meals, pours water three times over his hands<sup>4</sup> and cuts one of the two loaves. Thereupon the meal is eaten, the first of the three meals prepared beforehand for every sabbath.

From this time until the next sunset no work of any kind must be done; what is allowed and what is not allowed is the subject of innumerable rabbinical decisions. All things which were used during the week, known as *Muktzah* are, if possible, put aside on the sabbath. Even the tallith (praying shawl) for the sabbath is different; tephillin (phylacteries) are not used for the same reason, or because the day itself is so holy as to make their use unnecessary. Especially strict are the rules connected with fire: no fire may be kindled, put out, or poked; a burning light may neither be trimmed nor carried. Of course, no cooking can be done, but food and water are often preserved hot over a lamp kept burning from before the sabbath. All writing is forbidden as work. A friend of mine, a Jewish doctor, but lax on these points, once got into serious trouble by commencing to write a prescription for a poor sufferer amid a crowd of the orthodox.

But whatever may be allowed "within the city," still less is permitted "outside the walls." Inasmuch as many towns and colonies have no definite boundaries, a boundary is usually drawn by stretching across all undefined points an *Arav* or "sabbath wire," like a telegraph wire; the exact height and disposition of this wire are defined in the sacred books. Within the walls or wire, a handkerchief may be carried, *i. e.*, may be put in the pocket; outside it may not be "carried," but may be bound around the waist!

A man wishing to pay a visit to friends at a greater distance than a "sabbath day's journey," namely, one thousand yards<sup>5</sup> outside the city limits, is allowed to go before Friday's sunset to a point distant from his destination "a sabbath day's journey," and laying down there a piece of bread, he exclaims, "This is my house." He may then pay his visit, return when he likes to

<sup>4</sup> The Talmud states that "those who do not wash their hands before meals come to poverty."

<sup>5</sup> Derived from Exod. 16:29, compared with Numb. 35:5.

the spot where he deposited the bread, and after Saturday's sunset retrace his steps to the city.

The sabbath is literally a day of rest. The men spend much of it in sleeping; the remaining hours, unless occupied by the three fixed services, are devoted to visiting, gossiping, and among some to drinking. In the afternoon the young people go for a promenade in the most available public place; if within the "city" boundaries, there is nothing to limit the amount of walking. Saturday evening when the sabbath is over is a great time for festive gatherings; parties may usually be seen till quite late wending their way homeward with lanterns. In lighting lamps at the end of the sabbath no haste must be shown, as it is believed that the souls of the departed pass their sabbath in paradise, but have to return to the land of darkness when the day ends; the ending must therefore be put off as long as possible.

The extreme veneration for the sabbath is well illustrated by the following story, well known in Jerusalem: Collononus was chief rabbi of Jerusalem nearly two hundred years ago. One sabbath, it is said, he was worshiping at the Jewish wailing-place, when some of his co-religionists came rushing toward him, saying the whole Jewish quarter was in an uproar because a Moslem boy had been found murdered and the Moslems declared the Jews had done it.<sup>6</sup> While they were speaking, some Turkish officials arrived and carried off Collononus to the governor of Jerusalem. The Pasha declared that, as it seemed to him clear that the boy had been murdered by the Jews, he would heavily punish the whole community unless he, the chief rabbi, could produce the criminal. Collononus replied that he would find out who did it. He had the dead body laid in the midst; then he called for paper and pen, and wrote certain secret signs, including the "ineffable name of God." He then laid the paper to the lips of the dead boy, who was immediately able to speak; being interrogated as to the cause of his death, the boy sat up and pointed out a Moslem in the crowd as the murderer. The

<sup>6</sup>This is an example of the oft-recurring "blood accusation," *i. e.*, that Jews kill boys of other religions to mix their blood with the Passover bread! It is firmly believed by the ignorant masses in Damascus.

man was so stricken with fear at the sight of the dead body accusing him that he at once owned up, and the Jewish community was saved. Collonus, however, although he had temporarily resuscitated a dead body, was so conscience-stricken at having violated the sabbath—by writing—that he ordained that when he died no tombstone should be erected over his body, but he should be buried by the wayside and for a hundred years every Jew passing by should cast a stone upon his grave in execration of his memory. Tradition says that three times a tombstone was placed on his grave, but each in turn was broken or disappeared the following night. In any case his grave today is still pointed out in the valley of Jehoshaphat, near the “Tomb of Zechariah,” and still the Jews throw stones upon the heap.